
Book Review

Cameron D. Clausing: *Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck: Revelation, Confession, and Christian Consciousness* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology)

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Steve Bishop

Independent researcher

Presteigne, Wales

Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck is the revised version of Clausing's doctoral thesis of 2021: "‘Christian dogmatic does not yet exist’: the influence of the nineteenth century Historical Turn on the theological methodology of Herman Bavinck" (University of Edinburgh) supervised by James Eglinton.

Clausung, now the Lecturer in Applied Theology and Missional Engagement and the Dean of Students at Christ College in Australia, maintains that the key question for Bavinck was, what has Berlin (the academy) to do with Kampen (the church)? Clausung attempts to show how Bavinck navigated modernity, in the shape of historicism, and orthodoxy.

As he notes Bavinck grew up in the period when the shadow of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) hung over the Dutch academy. It was a time when Dutch theology leant heavily on German influences, and the nineteenth century had a historical turn. History was now viewed as a science and historicism became prevalent. Clausung thus attempts to investigate Bavinck's methodology in light of this historical turn. He discusses Bavinck's views on revelation, the church confessions, and Christian consciousness in light of this. He explores how Bavinck held them together and how Bavinck's understanding of theological method as an organism enables an integration of modernity and orthodoxy.

Chapter 1 considers the intellectual context of the long nineteenth century, from the French Revolution (1789) to the start of World War I (1914). A time of the rise of historicism, when as Clausen observes the Enlightenment ideal was extended to the historical realm. Here, Clausen considers how history as a science was formative in nineteenth-century theological reflection. Chapter 2 explores Bavinck's method in light of this and the role of the organism/organic metaphor favoured by Bavinck.

In Chapter 3, Bavinck's approach to revelation is explored. As Clausen points out Bavinck's starting point is God has spoken, *Deus dixit*. Revelation is important to Bavinck; it plays a key role in his approach. His Stone Lectures were devoted to it. Theology is only possible because God has revealed himself and he is knowable. As Clausen's ably shows, for Bavinck scripture is the foundation of his Trinitarian theology and his conception of revelation has a Trinitarian character (100). As Clausen notes: "As Bavinck developed it, the doctrine of God determines the doctrine of revelation. As a painter exists before she paints and the painting reveals something of who she is, so, for Bavinck, God exists before creation and his creation reveals him because it bears his imprint as Creator" (105). And again: "For Bavinck, revelation presupposes a Triune God and that Triune God perfectly reveals himself as Triune in his redemptive acts, principally in the incarnation and Pentecost" (115).

Chapter 4 engages with the role of the creeds and the confessions. For Bavinck, theology is best done in the context of the church. Bavinck was aware that there is a tension between overvaluing the confessions and reading the Scriptures as a sourcebook. As Clausen convincingly argues, for Bavinck the confessions have a *ministerial* role, while scripture has a *magisterial* role for dogmatics. Inevitably, Bavinck sees an organic connection between the two; the confessions act like a map for navigating scripture.

In Chapter 5 the focus is on Christian consciousness, with Clausen delving into Bavinck's view that "theological methodology must account for the subject doing theology". This methodology involves the individual theologian's experiences and the contemporary context. While rooted in the past, theology must also "work for the future". The chapter illustrates how Bavinck envisions theology as an organic entity, emphasizing that historically stable doctrines must evolve and develop to engage with present-day concerns. Bavinck's assertion that "growth is an implicit reality to the organic" (188) and his view that "because theology is an organicism, there is life and growth in it" (191) underscore the dynamic nature of theology. This growth is essential for theology to effectively address the issues of the day.

Clausing adeptly demonstrates that, despite the influence of historicism, Bavinck avoids succumbing to its relativistic implications. His theological project unfolds as a dynamic response to history, maintaining a delicate balance between orthodox grounding in the historical Reformed tradition and an openness to ongoing development. In essence, Bavinck's theology emerges as a nuanced engagement with history, shaping the present and allowing for future theological growth. He is both orthodox and modern.

The book includes a brief appendix of key dates in Bavinck's life, a 16-page bibliography, and a well organised index. With its valuable content this book is a useful addition to the currently burgeoning Bavinck literature.